



Montana Historical Society

Impact Report '23-'24



The Montana Historical Society preserves Montana’s past, shares our stories, and inspires exploration, to provide meaning for today and vision for tomorrow.

By 2025, MTHS will be a world-class organization and a community hub, connecting hundreds of thousands of people to Montana’s past. MTHS will engage more people than ever in exploring our histories by developing statewide opportunities that are inclusive, welcoming, and stimulating to all.

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Photo: Richard S Buswell

Letter from the Director

During the past two years, the Montana Historical Society has preserved nearly 30,000 items. We’ve provided information and resources to nearly 60,000 researchers, educators and students. And we’ve connected more than 130,000 people with each other and with our past. Although our building is closed, we continue to impact Montanans and visitors every day.

We do that by continuing to collect and preserve the art, artifacts, and archival materials that capture our stories. These collections help us share Montana’s history through exhibits, online repositories, research and publications. They are the very core of what we do at the Historical Society.

Just as important as collecting the items that capture our stories is sharing those stories with the next generation. As we continue to build our Montana History & Civics Education Endowment, we look forward to engaging more Montana students in their exploration of Montana’s history through tours of the Heritage Center, State Capitol, and historic sites around the state.

While we anticipate opening the Montana Heritage Center in the fall of 2025, we are rolling out new ways to connect with all of you today. New types of programming, paired with our tried-and-true lectures and events, have helped us to connect new audiences and continuing supporters to each other and to our past.

We look forward to next November when we will welcome you to visit us at the Montana Heritage Center. With immersive, interactive exhibits that tell Montana’s stories from many perspectives, our new home will be welcoming and community centered. In our new classrooms and comfortable research spaces we will greet visitors as they dig into, discover, and explore our history.

I hope you will plan to visit us in the Montana Heritage Center, where we will **Preserve** our past, **Educate** students of all ages, and **Connect** visitors with history in new and exciting spaces.

Molly Kruckenberg

Molly Kruckenberg
Director



Leadership Team

- Administration** – Emily McKeever, CPA
- Development & Membership** – Ginny Sullivan
- Library & Archives** – Roberta Gebhardt
- Museum** – Jennifer Bottomly-O’looney
- Outreach & Education** – Martha Kohl
- Publications** – Jeff Bartos
- Public Information** – Eve Byron
- State Historic Preservation Office** – Peter Brown

For a complete staff listing, please scan the QR code or visit mths.mt.gov/staff



Letter from the President of the Board of Trustees

During the past two years, the Montana Historical Society has grown and transformed in many ways. With the sold-out History Conferences to packed free public lectures on Thursday evenings, the Historical Society helped hundreds of people engage with Montana’s past. With even more staff on board, expanded programming includes tours of the State Capitol and a vast number of special events aimed at young adults and children.

The team at the Society has served Montana in many other ways during the past two years. They provided countless hours of consultation and grant funding for historic preservation projects; published award-winning books and Montana the Magazine of Western History each quarter; and made sure you continue to have access to Montana made products, novelty items, and western history books at the Museum Store, temporarily located on Helena’s Walking Mall.

Behind the scenes, even more is happening. The Library and Archives staff are skillfully creating tools and resources to make research easier both digitally and in-person. And the Museum staff are working full tilt designing the exhibits and experiences that will be in the Montana Heritage Center. The staff spent 2020-2022 packing the collections and artifacts to safeguard them during construction. Today, staff and volunteers are unpacking and putting more than 65,000 artifacts in their new home.

You can tell that the talented and dedicated team at the Montana Historical Society is striving to ensure we preserve and share our stories of Montana’s past. We are incredibly fortunate to have so many committed, diligent people dedicated to safeguarding our past for future generations.

It is an exciting time to be the President of the Board of Trustees. I speak for all the Trustees when I say we are looking forward to sharing the Montana Heritage Center with all of you in 2025. Plan to join us in Helena next fall and again in the early summer of 2026 to celebrate and immerse ourselves and our communities in Montana history and the multitude of activities being planned. Stay tuned for details.



Tim Fox
President of the Board of Trustees
Former Attorney General, State of Montana



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About the Montana Historical Society

The Montana Historical Society, founded in 1865 by the Montana Territorial Legislature, pursues our mission to preserve Montana’s past, share our stories, and inspire exploration, to provide meaning for today and vision for tomorrow. We accomplish our mission by collecting, preserving, and providing access to art, artifacts, photographs, and documents. We strive to educate Montanans and visitors through programming, publications, research collections, art and artifact collections, online resources, and exhibits.



Our Programs

Administration

The Administration program provides supervision, administration, and coordination of the agency. Activities include fundraising, membership, public information, payroll and personnel, financial reporting, business management, security and guest services, building management, information technology, and retail operations.

Library & Archives

The Library & Archives develops and cares for MTHS’s collection of research materials, including books, documents, newspapers, photographs, films, maps, and other materials. They assist the public in the use of the collections through reference services and reproductions, cataloging, and online databases and repositories. The program is the State Archives and provides training for like institutions.

Museum

The Museum preserves and manages the Society’s art and artifact collections, including historic, ethnographic, and archaeological items. They catalog, apply preventative preservation procedures, and facilitate conservation projects. The program produces exhibits and manages a loan program for other museums. They provide training for like institutions, administer the Original Governor’s Mansion, care for the art at the Capitol and the Capitol Complex; and provide research services.

Publications

The Publications program oversees the production, printing, and distribution of an award-winning quarterly journal as well as books on Montana and western history. Montana The Magazine of Western History showcases the people, places, and events of Montana and the West.

Outreach & Education

The Outreach & Education program provides educational experiences for Montanans and visitors of all ages, including conferences, workshops, tours, hands-on learning, web-based learning, and educational trunks. The Education program plans and produces curriculum materials, and instructional literature as well as provides training workshops for K-12 educators. They oversee the National Register Sign Program, the Centennial Farm and Ranch Program, and the Volunteer Program.

State Historic Preservation Office

The State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) administers the Montana Antiquities Act and Montana’s involvement in the National Historic Preservation Act. The program maintains an inventory of recorded historic and archaeological sites and recommends certification of projects for federal tax credits, through the Tax Reform Act. SHPO administers the National Register of Historic Places, through the Preservation Review Board, and the federal Certified Local Government Program.

Montana Heritage Center Update

Significant progress is under way inside and out!

The exterior of the addition is the most visible sign that our ambitious undertaking is marching toward completion. The walls are up, the windows are in, the walkways are cemented, and the landscaping is growing. The installation of an amphitheater on the west lawn is an exciting opportunity for the Montana Historical Society to offer programming in an outdoor space.

Inside those walls is a whirlwind of activity. The 66,000-square-foot addition is ready for the Museum staff to start moving in. Along with working on the Homeland Gallery exhibits, staff will find homes on our compact storage shelves for the rest of the 65,000 pieces of art and artifacts in our collections. The Event Center is ready for tables and chairs, and we're seeking a business to run the café.



Members of the construction team representing the State of Montana, Sletten Construction, and Cushing Terrell, stand in the Central Commons.

Renovations inside the historic half of the project are ramping up, with contractors making significant strides while ensuring they maintain the integrity of the four-story structure. Staff from the Library & Archives are anticipating moving in soon, along with the hundreds of thousands of photos, books, and papers that are so valuable to researchers.

Galleries, exhibits, and art installations are in the final stages of design and are being tested and fabricated. Once finished, they will be installed beginning in January

in anticipation of our doors opening in the fall of 2025.

A series of exciting grand opening events are being planned for the fall of 2025 and early summer 2026. More will be announced as construction and installation of exhibits are completed and plans for events are finalized.

Stay updated and learn more about the Montana Heritage Center at montanasmuseum.org or scan the code.



100,000 + Annual visitors expected, including in-state visitors, students, and tourists

\$22,000,000 Forecasted annual economic contribution to Montana's economy



Digitizing History

While our public reference room is closed because of the ongoing construction renovations, the Library & Archives staff is focusing on projects that will enhance the user experience when we reopen – and some the public can access now.

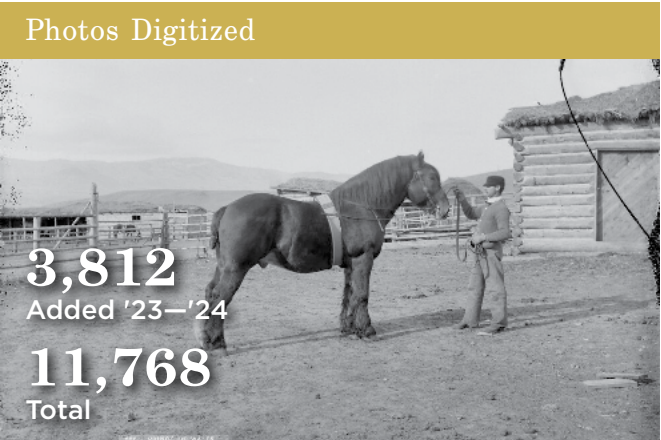
Projects include

Montana Newspaper Digitization – Through a partnership with Newspapers.com, more than 70 percent of our microfilm has been digitized. Access is provided through a public portal on our website, which includes content that is in the public domain. Our in-house portal contains all the newspapers that have been digitized. Pouring over historic newspapers is easier than ever due to the ability to search using keywords.

Montana Highway Commission Minutes – Highways are a lifeline in a state as large as Montana, and their history can be tracked through the Montana History Portal. The Montana Highway Commission Minutes are filled with interesting tidbits, like the need to create ways to control traffic on state highways that were adjacent to “motor-view theaters.” The records, ranging from 1913 to 2006, document the work of the commission, which from its inception through various name changes and reorganizations, remains an integral part of Montana State Government.

F. Jay Haynes Digitization – We’re continuing to add digital images to the Montana History Portal from Haynes’ glass plate negatives from the 1870s-1880s. That time frame focused on Northern Pacific Railroad construction from the Dakota Territory through Montana to Washington and Oregon, along with views of Yellowstone National Park. This work builds on a Cultural & Aesthetics Grant that was completed in 2023.

Archive Expansion



History Saved – The Great Falls AME Church

A long-term relationship exists between the Montana State Historic Preservation Office and Union Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Great Falls. That’s led not only to a 2023 feature-length documentary on the hidden stories of Montana’s Black past, but also to almost \$700,000 in recent grants to help preserve one of the most significant properties associated with Montana’s African American civil rights history.

Montana State Historical Society Historian Kate Hampton has worked with AME church members since 2003, when she identified funding and helped with the research that landed the property in the National Register of Historic Places. MTHS Trustee Ken Robison contributed to the nomination, and with Robert Harris – a retired Great Falls NAACP chapter president – they instigated the MTHS’s Montana African American Heritage Resources Project.

AME Pastor Betsy Williams said the grants SHPO wrote on behalf of the church, as well as featuring the church and its people in the documentary, both lifts the spirits of the church members and educates people about the lengthy and wide-ranging impact the Black community has had in Montana.

Pastor Williams singled out Hampton for her active participation in preservation, noting that “She is the soul of the historic building, ensuring that AME’s heritage is remembered and cherished.”

“Her commitment to history’s cause is a cornerstone in preserving and sharing these stories. Union Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church is profoundly thankful for her steadfast historic preservation principles.”

Hampton is quietly modest about the accomplishment but pleased with the efforts of all of those involved that led to the successful documentary and AME grants.

“Part of the MTHS’ mission is to save Montana’s past, and I’m honored to do that work every day,” Hampton said.

Do you have a historic property you would like to preserve or need information about? Visit mths.mt.gov/shpo

Tours Of The Capitol & Original Governor’s Mansion

The guided tours and field trips offered by the Montana Historical Society offer guests and school children opportunities to discover Montana art, culture and heritage.

Permanent and seasonal guides connect visitors from across Montana – and across the world – to stories of place and interpretations of the Capitol Building and Original Governor’s Mansion. Inevitably tour participants remark, “I learned something new today!”

Historically, the MTHS provided the guides for the Capitol tours, but budget cuts during the 2017 legislative session prompted the state agency to suspend the tours along with other cost-saving measures. More recently, the legislature gave the MTHS approval to hire guides, and the tours started in the summer of 2024. During the June to August tour season of 2024 alone, guides provided tours seven days a week for more than 2,500 people at the Montana Capitol.

The guides provide insight into the many paintings and statues that adorn the Capitol walls and ceilings, noting that the artworks serve as more than mere decoration – they also depict the Treasure State’s storied past and the notable figures who played key roles in the state’s development.

Tours of the Original Governor’s Mansion also are popular. During the tour season of 2024, more than 1,500 guests explored the ornate, Queen Anne-Style mansion that served as home to Montana’s First Families from 1913-1959. Using props and historical photographs, guides bring the past alive and invite guests to experience history in a fun and interactive way.

Can’t make it to Helena? Take a 43-minute video tour of the Capitol or the 23-minute tour of the Original Governor’s Mansion from the comfort of your own home. Find links to these virtual tours and get the tour schedule at mths.mt.gov/education/tours



A Unique View Of Abandoned Montana

Dr. Richard Buswell is well-known as a Helena allergist. But while that may have been his profession, his passion always has been photography. With the Montana Historical Society Press, Buswell’s black and white images – beautifully crafted, sometimes unnerving, and always thought provoking – are captured in “The Quest: A Montanan’s Photographic Journey.” MTHS Press partnered with the University of Montana Press for the book.

The quiet, retired physician is tickled with the interest in his book, which uses a unique assortment of his artistic photographs to depict ghost towns, deserted homesteads, and the back road places that time forgot.

“I took these photos because these places called to me, to record them for posterity before they’re lost,” Buswell said. In his book, he added that “I first hiked in the mountains as a child, and now, I am revenant. Beginning in 1971, I carried my camera equipment with me ... As I enter the last chapter of my life, aging has limited my ability to pack in my equipment in search of the abandoned.”

While producing the book, the Montana Historical Society acquired Buswell’s complete oeuvre as part of its permanent collections. Those are housed in the

MTHS Library & Archives, available to all Montanans and anyone wishing to see the collection.

His remarkable photography also is held in more than 200 museums, nationally and internationally, including the Smithsonian American Art Museum and the Library of Congress.

“Dr. Buswell has created images of some of the most haunting relics of Montana’s settler period,” notes Jeff Bartos, editor and publications manager for the Montana Historical Society. “We were honored and delighted to work with him on this spectacular book.”

Buswell’s book may be purchased at the Museum Store, located at 101 No. Last Chance Gulch in Helena or online at mths.mt.gov/store.

Inclusive Views Of Montana's Past

From the inception of the Montana Heritage Center, the Montana Historical Society has been committed to fostering authentic sovereign nation engagement to ensure the programming and exhibits include an Indigenous perspective. To assist in the effort, the Historical Society contracted with Major Robinson, a Northern Cheyenne exhibit designer and tribal liaison. Robinson worked with Amanda Trum, a MTHS curator, to assemble the Tribal Stakeholders Group, which includes representation from every sovereign nation in Montana.

Robinson and Trum meet with the Tribal Stakeholder representatives once a week via Zoom to get their input on multiple aspects of the project. They also meet in person for two days every six months to tour the progress of the Heritage Center construction and review interpretation development. This includes the selection of artifacts, written content and narratives, graphics, illustrations, and photographs, which are included throughout the Homeland Gallery. In addition, the Tribal Stakeholders helped identify fellow tribal members to participate in the media components of the various exhibits and have helped facilitate filming on each reservation.

Included in the Homeland Gallery is a zone dedicated to the sovereign nations, which will feature artifacts, narratives, photographs, and media informing visitors of the 13 Nations and the Métis who reside within the boundaries of the state of Montana. The Tribal Stakeholders have been especially helpful in bringing each Tribe's unique indigenous perspectives to the Celebration of Nations zone. To help in gathering this tribal exhibit information and ensuring its indigenous accuracy, the Historical Society has contracted with Native consultants Francine Spang-Willis, Dennis Smith, and Dr. Richard Littlebear.

Another aspect of the project that Robinson, Trum, and the Tribal Stakeholders helped shepherd is weaving Indigenous culture into the architecture and landscaping of the new facility. As a result, the Montana Heritage Center will feature a unique cultural walking path along the north and west side of the museum, as well as a Sovereign Nations Arbor at the east entry of the building that showcases each nation's flags. In addition, a first-of-its-kind smudge room at the east entry will allow visitors the option to smudge and will teach the uninitiated about this process.

The intent is to continue to work with the Tribal Stakeholder representatives long after the opening of the new Montana Heritage Center to ensure that the Historical Society continues to grow strong relations with the sovereign nations.

Tax Credit Projects Reviewed



15
FY '23
21
FY '24
36
Total

Conservation Projects



4
FY '23
7
FY '24
11
Total

National Register Listings



17
FY '23
9
FY '24
26
Total

National Register Signs



55
FY '23
38
FY '24
83
Total

Students Using Footlockers



10,600
FY '23
15,001
FY '24
25,601
Total

History Conference Attendees



385
FY '23
284
FY '24
669
Total

Tribal Stakeholders



2
FY '23
32
FY '24
34
Total

THPO Engagement



9
FY '23
24
FY '24
33
Total

Centennial Farm & Ranch Listings



4
FY '23
5
FY '24
9
Total



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Engaging Montanans



Laura Marsh

Like so many historical societies whose members are mainly Baby Boomers, we didn't have a Clue how to be attractive to the elusive folks known as Gen Z and Millennials.

Until we hired Laura Marsh, known better as Lau.

As our Outreach and Education Community Engagement Specialist,

Lau has been instrumental in opening the doors (even while we're closed for construction) not just to our typical program attendees but also to the next generation, who historically haven't been interested in history. One way Lau is doing this is by opening the doors to the Original Governor's Mansion for rounds of the game "Clue."

The available slots for the first game quickly filled with young professionals, who had a rollicking time guessing "who done it." This summer she hosted three more Clue offerings, all of which filled to capacity, again with her peers. One Clue game even was auctioned during the Myrna Loy's annual gala, raising \$1,700 for the Helena cultural center.

Speaking of the Myrna Loy, Lau worked with that organization and other cultural partners, including the Holter Museum, the City of Helena, Alive at Five, and Art Mobile, to organize four days of activities for Juneteenth, a holiday commemorating June 19, 1865, when federal troops in Texas enforced the Emancipation Proclamation. This is the third year the Montana Historical Society has spearheaded what is becoming a popular community event.

Lau also organized the live demonstration of a historic stamp mill in Philipsburg, Montana; a commemoration of the Indian Citizenship Act; hands-on children's workshops; and dozens of history lectures and other community events.

O&E Program Manager Martha Kohl said Lau brings a refreshing perspective in reaching out to young people who hopefully will be the next generation of history buffs, while not alienating our core current supporters.

"Lau is a bundle of excitement wrapped around a core understanding of history, which comes from her master's degree in anthropology from Stanford University," Kohl said. "Her outreach efforts ensure that the MTHS is relevant and available to all."

Learn about upcoming programs and sign up for event notifications at mths.mt.gov/education.

MT 250 Marks Historic Milestone With Connections

The Nation's (say it slowly) semi-quin-centennial celebrates the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence and the founding of the United States of America. In 2026, the anniversary is being recognized across the country in ways that promote our nation's history including the history of Indigenous peoples who occupied this place since time immemorial.

The 2023 Montana Legislature tasked the Montana Historical Society with setting the stage for the 2026 commemoration of this historical event, establishing a 250th Commission that includes educators, veterans, historic preservation professionals, and Indian Education for all experts.

The group meets regularly to prepare for the commemoration. In addition, commission members Molly Stockdale and Chris Averill traveled to Washington, D.C., for America's 250's Convening of the States. They shared Montana 250's programming and initiatives with other commissions; learned what those states are planning; and met with Montana's Congressional delegation to promote participation in the America 250 Caucus.

At the heart of the MT 250 vision and mission is an overarching theme: Everything is Connected. The concept is that not only are we united as people through our shared history, but we also are joined by our landscapes – rivers and lakes, mountains and meadows, prairies and pastures, flora and fauna, natural resources and native forests. The theme is founded in the Tribal understanding that we are all related to everyone and everything. This theme was

central to the entries from Montana's student winners of the very first America's Field Trip, which asked entrants "What Does America Mean to You?"

In September, the commission unveiled Montana's semiquincentennial programs and initiatives. Stakeholders from across the Treasure State – educational institutions, historical preservation entities, civic engagement organizations, tourism, arts, and heritage groups, veteran and military organizations, and local, state, national, and tribal partners – invite all Montanans to join in the commission's efforts to foster civic engagement and raise awareness of both United States and Montana history, including the stories of Tribal nations.

The MT 250 Commission hopes that as the nation approaches the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence, we can collectively reflect on the importance of this action in 1776, celebrate the contributions Montanans have made to our shared history, and promote a renewed participation in the shared future of the United States of America.

Learn more about Montana's 250th Anniversary at america250mt.org

Social Media Views

FY '23 3,352,149

FY '24 4,507,337

Total 7,859,487

Social Media Followers

FY '23 87,259

FY '24 110,134

Public Program Participants

FY '23 4,670

FY '24 6,346

Total 11,016

Programs Provided

FY '23 84

FY '24 111

Total 195

Reference Interactions

FY '23 15,765

FY '24 17,977

Total 33,742

Visitors/Tour Participants

FY '23 16,045

FY '24 6,453

Total 22,498

Educator Workshops

Workshops 29

Attendees 623

Counties 11

Online Archive Use

FY '23 982,444

FY '24 951,240

Total 1,933,684

Members & Subscribers

FY '23 5,527

FY '24 6,298

Average 5,912



Why I Support The Montana Historical Society



Jeannie Etchart holding a Charlie Russell print said to have a connection to her great-great-grandfather..

Jeannie Etchart, her family and ancestors love Montana because of the wide-open spaces, the land’s opportunities, and the entrepreneurial spirit.

Generations ago, her family came to Montana from the Basque country in France and made a life for themselves and for their family. Jeannie’s great-grandparents were recently inducted into the Montana Cowboy Hall of Fame.

As Jeannie holds a print of the Charlie Russell painting “Bronc to Breakfast,” created in 1908, she laughs as she points to the print.

“Family lore has it that my great-great-grandfather Newton is the cook,” she says. “Charlie Russell painted himself in the corner.”

She notes that while it’s fun to have the print and share the story of her great-great-grandfather, it’s even better to see it in person, on a much larger scale, in the Montana Historical Society’s Charlie Russell Gallery. The updated gallery will be twice the size of the old one, with much more room to display Russell’s art and life with his wife and business manager Nancy Russell.

“I personally donated to the Montana Heritage Center in honor of my parents,” Jeannie said. “My father was deeply involved in Montana politics and Montana causes, and spent a lot of time at the Capitol. My mom also fell in love with the West’s landscapes and the way of life. And she really loved Western art.

“So this was really special to me to do something in their honor.”

Watch Jeannie’s interview on why she gave to the Montana Heritage Center.



What Being A Member Means To Me

Maggie Davis

Maggie Davis’s time with MTHS began as a docent, where she led tours and baked cookies for students touring the museum. Now, as a member and photographer, she has a special appreciation for documenting history.

“Being able to document the times you live in – either through photographs, paper or digital files – is important,” Maggie says. “People in the future can look back and say, ‘What was really motivating people then? What caused them to make those decisions?’”



Owen Robinson

Owen Robinson’s favorite part of his membership is a special place – The Library & Archives reference room. You may find him there, sifting through photographs, journals, or maps, seeking to understand a specific part of Montana history.

“I’ve always thought that understanding history makes people in society better,” Owen said. “That’s how I got involved with the Montana Historical Society. I’ve spent a lot of time doing research there. Now I’ve been a member for years.”

Scott Walker

Scott Walker is a member of the Montana Historical Society because he believes in preserving history.

“The Native Americans were here, the French trappers were here, but a lot of information was never written down or collected,” Scott says. “As we go through two more centuries, we have a lot of information. But it has to be professionally collected and stored, or you’re not going to have it for generations afterward.”

“History is lost if it’s not preserved,” he said.



Not yet a member of MTHS?
Learn about membership benefits at
mths.mt.gov/membership



Donors

January 2023—August 2024

For more than 20 years, the Montana Historical Society has dreamed of preparing grand opening festivities for a new facility. Thanks to hundreds of supporters, we are pleased to be planning that grand opening at our new and renovated Montana Heritage Center.

These amazing individuals, businesses and foundations allow us to give Montana and the world a premier history museum and world-class facility for the public to use and enjoy. As we prepare to open, we are expanding and refining services, from providing Capitol tours to setting up museum exhibits. We couldn't do this work without your massive show of support.

With our deepest gratitude, thank you.

Montana Heritage Center Donors

Donations fund the construction of the Montana Heritage Center.

\$25M
Dennis and Phyllis Washington Foundation
\$10.4M
Norm Asbjornson
\$5M
BNSF Railway
\$1M—\$4,999,999
Anonymous Arthur M. Blank Family Foundation Barrick Gold Thomas Nygard Larry Len and LeAnne Peterson Tim and Carmen Sheehy Sletten Construction Companies Town Pump Charitable Foundation Westmoreland Mining
\$500K—\$999,999
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*Please contact us at MTHSDevelopment@mt.gov if we have incorrectly listed your name or if you would like to remain anonymous in future listings.

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For a list of all the donors to the Montana Heritage Center, please scan the QR code or visit montanamuseum.org/montana-heritage-center-donors

Mission & Program Support

Donations benefit the Montana Historical Society’s programs and provide essential funding for services to the public.

\$10K and up	
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\$1K–\$9,999	
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\$500–\$999	
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Montana History & Civics Education Endowment Donors


The endowment supports a field trip program to bring every student in the state of Montana to Helena to tour the Montana Heritage Center and Capitol at least once during their school career.

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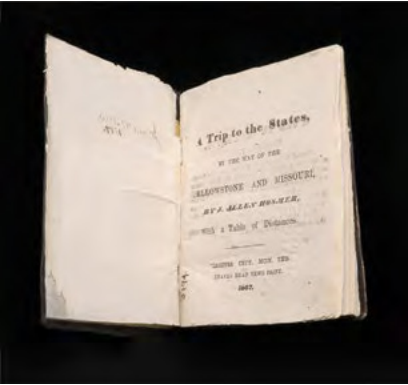
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Highlights from the MTHS Collection

John Hosmer Book

Montana Territory’s second published book sold for \$1 in gold dust in 1867. It was based on the diary of teenager John Hosmer, son of Montana’s first chief justice of the territorial supreme court. The book recounts his family’s journey from Virginia City to Detroit in 1865. It was printed one page at a time, and with a limited number of typeset pieces, he had to leave out capital letters and put commas where there should be periods. Hosmer apologized for that in the book’s forward. The covers were cardboard sheets pasted over with butcher paper and wrapped in brown cloth.



Elk Tooth Dress

An Amskapi Piikuni Elk Tooth Dress in the MTHS collection dates to before 1860 and originally was owned by Marguerite Black Weasel, a Blackfeet survivor of the 1870 Marias River Massacre and the wife of trader Joe Kipp. Conservators estimate the 54-inch-long dress could date to as early as 1830. It consists of two expertly tanned hides, possibly from mountain sheep, sewn together with sinew. It originally was decorated with 192 elk “ivories” (eye teeth) but is missing a few of them. A single dress ornamented with 50 to 300 elk cuspids would have been worth at least two good horses.



Dynamite Box Lid

One of the most poignant objects cared for by the Montana Historical Society is a simple yet priceless wooden lid of a dynamite box. On Feb. 27, 1943, Emil Anderson and 76 other coal miners entered the Smith Mine near Bearcreek and less than two hours into their shift a powerful blast sent soot and debris into the air. Only three workers escaped. Anderson had enough time to write a note in chalk on the dynamite box lid: “It’s 5 minutes pass (sic) 11 o’clock Agnes and children I’m sorry we had to go this way God bless you all. Emil with lots (of) kisse(s).”

Skull & Bones Carving

Father Anthony Ravalli created a wood carving of a human skull atop crossed femur bones as a memento mori – an artistic convention dating from the Middle Ages that reminded viewers that death was inevitable.



Charlie Russell Painting

Charlie Russell walked into the Montana Historical Society in 1909 carrying a watercolor titled “York” and gave it to the museum as a gift, saying he thought the Society should have it for future generations. MTHS now owns more than 230 pieces of Russell’s art, including oil and watercolor paintings, sketches, sculptures, and illustrated letters. A large part of the collection came from the Mackay family, who recently agreed to additional donations of Russell memorabilia.

Heart Monitor

Today’s Holter Heart Monitor is a small, wearable device that keeps track of your heart rhythm. It looked more like a reel-to-reel tape player when it was developed almost 60 years ago in Helena by Jeff Holter and William Glasscock. While today’s version is smaller, the Holter Heart Monitor is still used in cardiology wards around the world.



Learn more about artifacts like these in the MTHS Press book, **A History of Montana in 101 Objects**, available at the Museum Store mths.mt.gov/shop



Montana Historical Society

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